

March 7, 1969

Dr. J. George Harrar
President of the Rockefeller Foundation
111 West 50th Street
New York, New York 10020

Dear Dr. Harrar,

I am writing again to press you with what is now a concrete suggestion about promoting more innovative approaches to plant breeding.

This is to ask your foundation people to organize a brain storming conference on the relevance of new techniques and findings, which include: 1. somatic cell fusion (note Dr. Hildebrandt's article enclosed), 2. production of haploid genotypes and their subsequent doubling, 3. rescuing otherwise inviable hybrids by embryo culture (see Brink and Cooper, Botanical Review Vol. 13, Page 423-541, 1947), 4. biochemical genetic manipulation of plant genotypes in cell culture aminobaa to the isolation and testing of clones, 5. the constructive use of engineered viruses.

I do not necessarily see any panacea out of this and I fully realize that the testing and validation of new genotypes is a much more costly and laborious process than the production of new genetic variants. The field is, however, remarkably backward overall.

I realize that the most effective impetus to such an event would arise if I wouldable to take a more direct and personal interest in having it come about. I would then for example attempt to document in more detail the justification for it.

I regret that I am not in a position to do this nor to take too energetic a role in organizing such a conference but I would be happy to play at least some part in it if it could be arranged to be held on this campus. This remark should not discourage you from proceeding in another direction if the basic idea is a sound one. Another way to get it going might be to ask Dr. James D. Watson in his capacity as director of the Biology Laboratory at Cold Spring Harbor.

There are, I am sure, at least a half a dozen people of great intellectual insight who could contribute to this problem but who have never yet given more than a moments thought to it. I would see that the

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program ought to start with a first phase consisting of a kind of briefing, namely an attempt to lay out the basic problems in systematic form so that they can be understood by good biologists who are not professional plant breeders. Even if nothing else came out of it such an organization of the problem would have an important value of its own.

Sincerely yours,

Joshua Lederberg
Professor of Genetics

JL/rr